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1962/10/11

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11/10 #98

October 11, 1962

MEMORANDUM ON DONOVAN PROJECT

Immediately after my discussion with the Cannon Committee (including Taber, Ford and Mahon), I went to the White House and explained to the President and McGeorge Bundy the positions taken by Ford and Mahon, as covered in separate memorandum prepared by Mr. Warner. The President made the judgment that we should proceed with the negotiations, recognizing there would be some political consequences and criticisms, but he, the President, was willing to accept this as a fact.

I then showed the President photographs of the crates which presumably would carry, or were carrying, IL 28s, Soviet medium bombers, and were deck loaded on a ship which had arrived in Havana in the early days of October. The President requested that such information be withheld at least until after elections as if the information got into the press, a new and more violent Cuban issue would be injected into the campaign and this would seriously affect his independence of action.

McCone stated that these particular photographs could not be restricted as they had been disseminated to the Intelligence Community and several joint and specified commands, such as CINCLANT, SAC, NORAD, and others and would be reported in the CIA Bulletin on Thursday morning. The President then requested that the report be worded to indicate a probability rather than an actuality because in the final analysis we only saw crates, not the bombers themselves. DCI agreed. The President further requested that all future information be suppressed. DCI stated that this was extremely dangerous.

It was then agreed that future information would be disseminated to members of USIB, with appropriate instructions that only those responsible for giving the President advice be given the information.

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Furthermore, that within CIA circles a minimum number of experts be informed. McCone stated there was no problem in CIA, that it was secure. It was therefore agreed that the USIB members would be instructed to restrict the information to their personal offices and fully and currently inform the Chiefs of Staff, the Chairman, the Service Secretaries and the Secretary of Defense. Similar restrictive action would be taken in State. Therefore all those involved in "giving advice to the President" would be fully informed. However operational divisions and the joint and specified commands would not be informed at this time, except at the direction of the above people who are receiving the information.

At this point the President mentioned that "we'll have to do something drastic about Cuba" and I am anxiously looking forward to the JCS operational plan which is to be presented to me next week.

McCone effected the above instructions by calling Mr. Cline, who was unavailable, and then Mr. Sheldon who agreed to prepare a procedure for review on Thursday morning.

McCone then called the Attorney General and advised him of his talk with the Cannon Committee. The Attorney General had no particular comment.

At six o'clock McCone received a report from Houston that Donovan had gone into a meeting at five o'clock. At eleven o'clock Houston reported the meeting was still in progress. At seven o'clock on Thursday morning Donovan still had no report.

At 11:15 General Eisenhower called McCone stating he was sorry a meeting could not be arranged, he was leaving very early the following morning for Gettysburg. McCone reported that negotiations were in progress and he also reported objections stated by several members of Congress. Eisenhower advised that the negotiations be pursued, indicating his support of it and furthermore stated that if the negotiations were satisfactorily concluded the complaints and objections would, in his words, disappear.

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McCone told General Eisenhower there were some defensible evidences of shipments of twin-engined light jet bombers. Eisenhower responded the situation must be watched very carefully. Positive action might be indicated and then he said there had been two instances where action was warranted but had not been taken. Eisenhower did not elaborate; however, I know from previous discussions he feels that when Castro embraced Communism publicly and announced publicly his allegiance to Moscow, we had then a reason to act militarily and if we had chosen to so act, such action would have been defensible.

On Thursday morning McCone reported by telephone to Mr. Kennedy, reviewing the Eisenhower discussion and stating that he, McCone, was concerned over Donovan's safety in view of the rash of publicity, most particularly the Herald Tribune article, and that he had instructed that contact be made with Donovan and that if things were not proceeding satisfactorily and a conclusion to the negotiations along the lines agreed in sight, then Donovan should come out. The Attorney General stated that he had no concern over Donovan's personal safety, that "they will not do anything to him". McCone stated he was not so sure and that he therefore concluded to bring Donovan out unless things were going well.

With reference to the political implications, McCone recalled that he had told the President and the AG that he would take all, or his full share of responsibility, that he wished the AG to bear this in mind as the position taken in this respect by Mr. McCone in the first conversation after his return from Europe still stood. AG expressed appreciation for this statement.

John A. McCone
Director

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